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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

# Memorandum



## THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600  
16 July 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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HIGHLIGHTS

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I. The military Situation in South Vietnam:  
Yesterday's engagement between an ARVN battalion of the armored cavalry division and a large Viet Cong force south of Da Nang near the Quang Nam Province capital of Hoi An has resulted in heavy casualties on both sides (Para. 1). The 52nd Ranger battalion is completing sweep operations in an area where an estimated Communist battalion yesterday attacked an ARVN regimental headquarters and a subordinate battalion in Binh Dinh Province (Para. 2). Two small-scale attacks were launched by the Viet Cong early today against government-controlled installations within 20 miles of Saigon (Para. 3). Battalion-strength elements of the 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, have deployed to Bien Hoa without incident (Para 4). The results of coastal surveillance operations conducted by Vietnamese and US naval units off South Vietnam during the week of 6-13 July have been received from MACV (Paras. 5-6).

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## II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

There are unconfirmed reports that Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, escaped leader of a February coup attempt, has been captured by police in a Saigon suburb and may have been severely wounded (Para. 1-2). Chief of the Joint General Staff and defense minister General Co has reportedly ordered troops in Saigon to "smarten up," and has also announced that available nonmilitary manpower will be mobilized into a "reserve army" (Para. 3). I Corps Commander General Thi [redacted]

[redacted] will not be subordinated to US authority and that he expects to come to power eventually despite the "Americans and the Catholics" (Para. 4-5).

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## III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:

Although hampered by bad weather which caused cancellation of some scheduled missions, US Navy aircraft struck the port facility at Ham Rong and hit an airfield under construction near Thanh Hoa. Armed route reconnaissance missions inflicted damage on a number of targets. (Paras. 1-3.) [redacted]

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V. Communist Political Developments: North Vietnamese Vice Premier Hoang Van Hoan has been getting red carpet treatment in Peiping, including meetings with Mao and Liu Shao-chi (Para. 1).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Despite bad weather, US aircraft conducted wide-ranging reconnaissance and strike missions against strategic chokepoints in eastern Laos during the past week. One plane was lost but the two-man crew was recovered safely (Paras. 1 and 2).

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## I. MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Yesterday's engagement between an ARVN battalion of the armored cavalry division and a large Viet Cong force south of Da Nang near the Quang Nam Province capital of Hoi An has resulted in heavy casualties on both sides (see 15 July Situation Report, Page I-1, Para. 2). The action, which apparently involved an attack against a paramilitary outpost and an attempted ambush of government reinforcements dispatched to the scene, resulted in initial friendly losses of 60 killed and 35 wounded. Unofficial estimates place Viet Cong losses at 150 killed, 52 of which have been confirmed by official MACV reporting, and 21 weapons captured. Heavy air strikes by USAF/VNAF tactical aircraft reportedly forced the departure of Communist troops from the area, and apparently inflicted the bulk of enemy casualties.

2. The 52nd Ranger battalion is completing a sweep of the area where an estimated Viet Cong battalion yesterday attacked an ARVN regimental headquarters and a subordinate battalion in Binh Duong Province. No further contact has been established with enemy units, and friendly casualties remain as originally reported: 49 killed (two US) and 54 wounded (four US).

3. Communist guerrillas launched two small-scale attacks early today against government-controlled installations within 20 miles of Saigon, according to late press reports. In the first of these actions, a village 15 miles west of Saigon was bombarded by rifle grenades for a period of 15 minutes. The second incident involved a mortar assault against an infantry unit stationed 20 miles west of the capital, near the Hau Nghia - Long An Province border. Friendly casualties in both engagements were considered light.

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4. On 15 July all infantry battalions of the 2nd Brigade, 1st US Infantry Division, landing at Vung Tau, arrived at Bien Hoa without incident. The 1/7 Artillery Battalion and a convoy of heavy equipment and supplies are scheduled to depart Vung Tau for Bien Hoa on 16 July to complete the deployment.

5. Vietnamese naval forces inspected 4,360 junks and 17,771 people during the week ending 13 July as coastal surveillance operations continued off South Vietnam. Two junks and 68 persons were detained; eight persons were confirmed as Viet Cong. No infiltration attempts were reported.

6. USN surveillance ships fired 222 rounds of 5-inch ammunition against Viet Cong concentrations in naval gunfire support missions during 6-13 July. In addition, 111 rounds of 5-inch illumination shells were fired on five targets in support of the US Marine landing at Qui Nhon on 6 and 7 July.

7. MACV's military report for 14 July shows 101 Viet Cong - initiated incidents, nine of them occurring during the 24-hour reporting period. There were no major new actions reported, as small-scale terrorism, mortar and small-arms harassing fire actions, mine detonations, and sabotage against major transportation routes remained widespread throughout the four corps tactical zones of South Vietnam.

8. Combat air operations were flown by American and Vietnamese aircraft against Communist troop concentrations and suspect base camps, supply points, and staging areas throughout South Vietnam on 14 July, with pilots reporting an estimated total of 250 Viet Cong killed, 141 structures destroyed, 118 damaged, and four sampans destroyed and four damaged. The most successful airstrikes of the day were conducted in the Mekong Delta, where 65 close air support attack sorties flown by friendly aircraft against enemy positions in Vinh Binh, Phong Dinh, Chuong Thien, and An Xuyen provinces reportedly resulted in 59 guerrillas killed, 62 structures destroyed, 67 damaged, and four sampans destroyed and four damaged.

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## II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Press reports from Saigon state that Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, escaped leader of the abortive coup of 19 February and of a purported second attempt on 20 May, was arrested this morning at a Catholic monastery in a Saigon suburb. The US Embassy has reported a recent poster campaign by the military government offering rewards for the capture of Thao, who was sentenced to death in absentia, but there is so far no embassy or South Vietnamese Government confirmation of Thao's arrest. Initial UPI versions of the story reported that Thao had been found dead in the monastery under mysterious circumstances following a police tip; UPI now states that Thao was arrested by police, was shot, and severely wounded.

2. Thao's specific whereabouts have not been known since the February coup attempt, but he has long been reported in the Saigon vicinity under the protection of certain militant Catholic sympathizers with his plotting against then strongman General Khanh. It has been considered likely that his presence was known to at least some government security services and that failure to apprehend him indicated some high-level protection. Thao is a Catholic as were many of his cohorts in the coup plot, and his death or execution could stir up new Catholic resentment or fears of anti-Catholic policies. However, Thao's record of chronic plotting over the past two years and his acknowledged past ties with the Communist Viet Minh leadership have probably served to discredit him among the bulk of moderate Catholics.

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3. The new chief of the Joint General Staff and concurrent defense minister, General Co, has proclaimed a "discipline week" for armed forces units in the Saigon area. Primarily concerned with appearance and behavior, the order may be intended to instill greater pride in the troops and to impress this week's high-level US mission. Earlier, Co reportedly had announced that all men between 18 and 48 and women between 20 and 25 would be inducted into a "reserve army." These "reserves" would have a kind of self-defense role in rural villages, and an unspecified civil defense role in the cities.

4. [redacted] I Corps commander General Thi [redacted] while his attitude is one of cooperating with the US in military operations, [redacted] does not intend to subordinate his power to US control. There have been some recent indications of Thi's desire to mount uncoordinated military operations against the Viet Cong, in or across the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Vietnam. [redacted]

[redacted] the general remarked that he expected that his attitude would cause the US sooner or later to try to eliminate him. Thi said that he would not fall into "the trap laid for him by the Americans and the Catholics," and that, at the right time, he would be in power despite these elements.

5. Thi has long been regarded as politically ambitious, although in recent months he has appeared satisfied to remain out of Saigon and in his I Corps command, possibly hoping to build a firm base of power for the future. Although Thi appears to be popular among the Buddhist-oriented population in the northern provinces, it is probable that cooperation between Thi and the Buddhists is more opportunistic than based on identity of goals. Buddhist leader Tri Quang recently described Thi as "not to be trusted."

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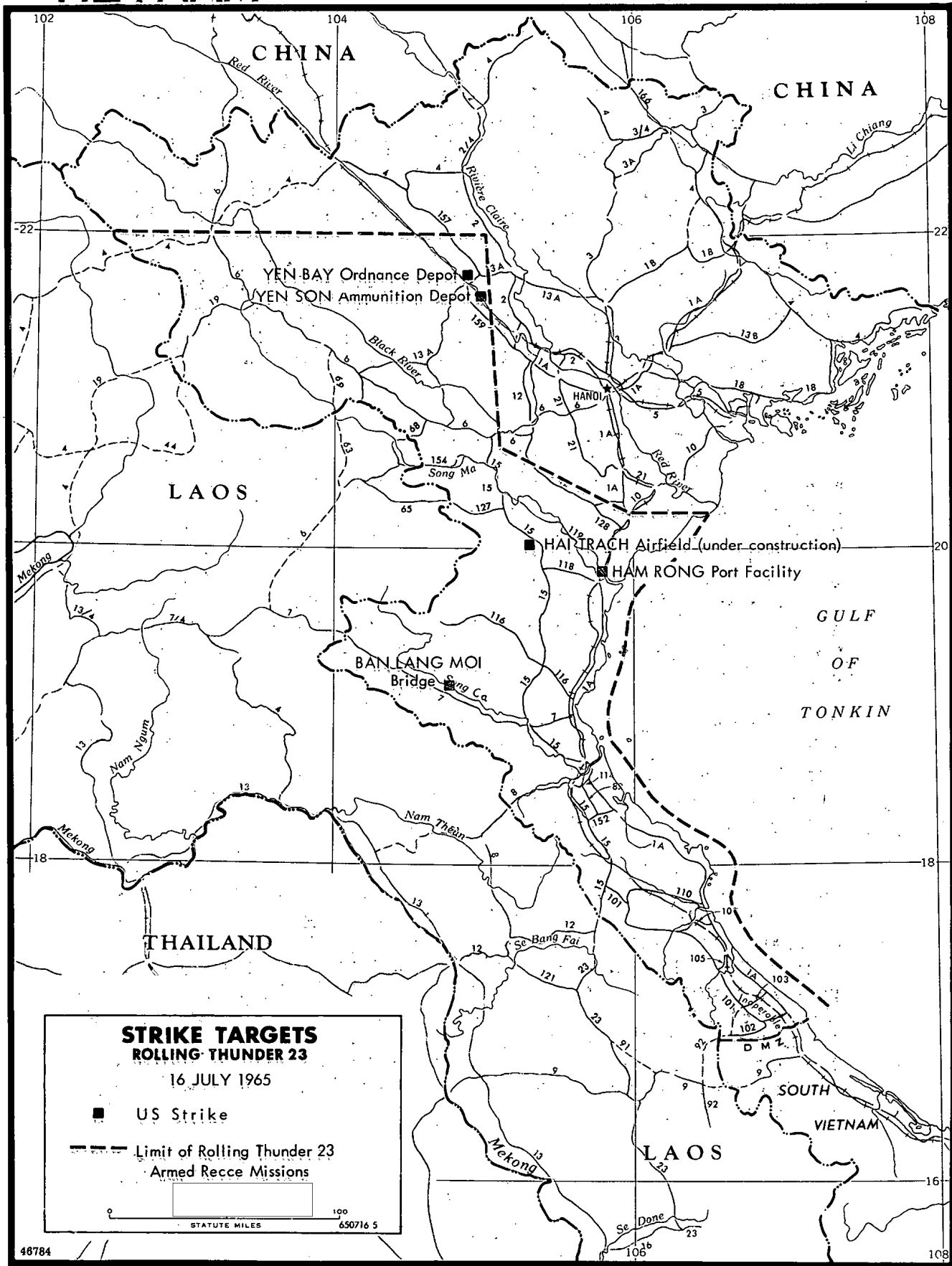
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# NORTH VIETNAM

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### III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Air strike operations slackened somewhat on 16 July as bad weather caused cancellation of scheduled USAF missions against the Yen Bay ordnance depot and the Yen Son ammo depot. However, scheduled strikes against the Ham Rong port facility and the airfield under construction at Hai Trach near Thanh Hoa were carried out and a number of armed route reconnaissance missions were flown. One aircraft crashed at sea because of mechanical failure. The pilot was recovered safely.

Carrier pilots from the Independence report all bombs landed in the target area at Ham Rong in day and night strikes, but no visual bomb damage assessment was possible. Six buildings were reported hit at the airfield construction site by planes from the Coral Sea.

3. In armed route reconnaissance activities, pilots report striking a number of radar sites, bridges, railroad cars, and other facilities. One span of the Ban Lang Moi Bridge was dropped and its northern approach was cratered. Ten railroad cars on the line south of Vinh were damaged.

  
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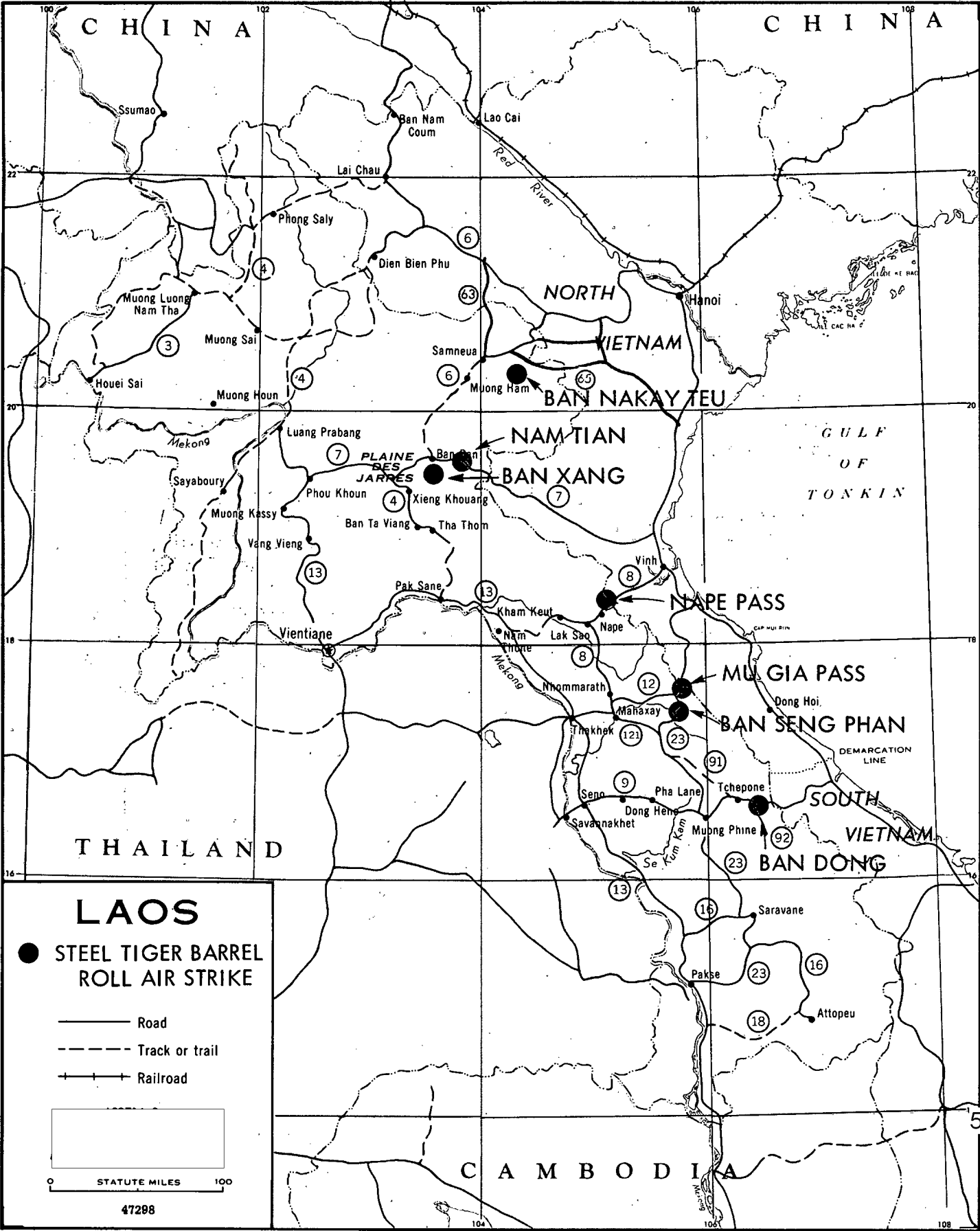
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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Peiping is giving North Vietnamese Vice Premier Hoang Van Hoan VIP treatment during the first leg of his trip to China, North Korea, Mongolia, and the USSR. On 16 July he was received by Mao Tse-tung and Liu Shao-chi for "cordial and friendly conversations." In keeping with the stated purpose of the delegation which is to "thank these countries for their assistance to the DRV," on the 15th Hoan thanked the Chinese for the "firmest, the most powerful, and the most effective aid."

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. US aircraft, although hampered by adverse weather conditions, conducted wide-ranging air reconnaissance and strike missions in eastern Laos during the past week. Armed reconnaissance was flown over the network of key infiltration routes into and through Laos, and interdiction strikes were launched against strategic chokepoints along Routes 6, 7, and 65 in northern Laos as well as against Mu Gia and Nape passes in the panhandle.

2. Air strikes were also mounted against several associated Communist military installations, including military areas at Nam Tian, Ban Xang, Ban Nakay Teu, Ban Seng Phan and Ban Dong (See Map). One aircraft, an A-6 Intruder jet from the USS Independence, was lost in the Samneua area on 14 July. The two-man crew was recovered the next day.

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